



Town of Berwyn Heights

5700 Berwyn Road
Berwyn Heights, MD 20740
Tel. (301) 474-5000
Fax (301) 474-5002

MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes August 17, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Christopher Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas, and Ethan Sweep. Also present were Interim Town Manager (ITM) Laura Allen, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, and Town Clerk Kerstin Harper.

I. Announcements

Mayor Dewey announced that Pontiac Street remains closed due to a watermain break while WSSC is preparing to make repairs. Absentee ballot applications for the upcoming Presidential election are available now. Everyone who wishes to vote by mail must request an absentee ballot; ballots will not be sent to every eligible voter automatically. Voted ballots can be returned by mail or dropped off at designated locations to be announced.

2. Discussion Items

Berwyn Heights emergency declaration update: Mayor Dewey said this item is on the agenda to clarify what the existing emergency declaration says and what the processes and roles of Town departments and staff during the emergency are.

ITM Allen gave an overview of the current status of the health emergency in Prince George's County. The Governor has loosened restrictions, and left it up to the counties to decide if they want to follow suit. Prince George's Health Officer Dr. Carter advises that the County is at a tipping point, where the coronavirus could either spread more rapidly or continue to decline. The County is therefore implementing an 'ambassador program' to monitor compliance with social distancing and masking regulations with which municipalities are asked to assist. The County is expected to release an updated executive order to respond to the current circumstances soon, and TM Allen is working on providing an updated declaration on how the Town operates in response to COVID-19.

In discussion, the following issues were raised:

- There is confusion clarity about what restrictions are currently in place for holding events, i.e. State, County and/or Town regulations.
- Berwyn Heights needs a plan spelling out who or which entity is responsible for deciding if an event or activity is safe, and a set of criteria to guide that decision.
- Different criteria apply for private events or gatherings as opposed to Town-hosted events.

- Separate approvals may be required if an event is proposed to take place on property that belongs to the County, such as a Park & Planning or PGCPs facility, or a Town facility.
- Town organizations would like to know if they can hold some in-person events that conform to current social distancing rules, for example a drive-in movie night.
- The County continues to discourage events and gatherings that are purely recreational but allows events that perform a social service.
- Recreational events, such as a movie night, might be difficult to control in terms of maintaining proper social distancing, especially if children are involved.
- The Town might be held liable for any new COVID cases if a Town organization holds an in-person event.
- Negative impacts on mental health should be considered along with physical health when continuing to impose restrictions on social gatherings.

Mayor Dewey suggested, as a next step, that ITM Allen and Chief Antolik come up with a definition of what constitutes a ‘social event,’ illustrated by a list of examples of events compatible with being held under the auspices of the Town. The Town Manager acting as Emergency Manager would decide which events are acceptable, but generally Berwyn Heights would follow Prince George’s County restrictions for private social gatherings, which are currently “limited to one person/family unit per 200 square feet, or a maximum of 50 persons - whichever is lower - at all locations and venues, including but not limited to: private residences, parades, festivals, conventions, and fundraisers.”

Review of Council Rules: Mayor Dewey explained there are two reasons a review of Council Rules is in order: 1) a new Council has been elected; 2) the current agenda process needs clarification and a more formalized timeline. ITM Allen elaborated, currently there is no firm deadline for Councilmembers to submit items to the agenda. This results in background documentation being posted without proper preparation, and insufficient time for the Council and members of the public to familiarize themselves with the background materials. It would be beneficial to leave some time between the deadline for submitting agenda items and deadline for posting the agenda to allow staff to research and pull together the appropriate documentation. She suggested a Friday posting deadline for worksessions and Monday posting deadline for Town meetings to give ‘reasonable notice’ as required under Maryland law.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Deadline for submitting items to the agenda should 2-3 days prior to the posting deadline;
- Same deadlines would apply to any submissions from citizens;
- Process needs to allow exceptions due to emergencies, which should be marked as such;
- Emergencies or urgent items should be approved by a majority of the Council;
- Items for discussion only might be exempted from deadline, or be discussed under department reports;
- E-newsletter must allow for late breaking items to be added without having been reviewed at a worksession;
- Worksessions should be reserved for discussion/ exploration of topics. No formal actions should be taken, e.g. no voting on motions with exception of emergencies;
- Worksession should have an ‘approval of agenda’ item, under which changes to the agenda could be made;
- Letters expressing a formal position of the Council regarding legislation or other matters should be approved by the entire Council after an effort is made to forge agreement.

Greater Riverdale Cares Partnership: Mayor Dewey explained she was approached by a local non-profit, Greater Riverdale Cares, to ask for support of their mission. The Group is raising money to pay for meals prepared by restaurants to feed families in need, thus helping both restaurants and their employees and people who need food. The Group would like the Town to 1) publicize their program and 2) recommend any Berwyn Heights restaurants that might be a good fit for participation.

Councilmembers expressed support for the program and sought clarification on the details. Berwyn Heights residents could receive food through the program. The meals are distributed by food pantries, churches and other charitable organizations. Independent restaurants Balkonie, Three Brothers and Miss Mabel's Fried Chicken were recommended for participation. The Council agreed to publicize the program in upcoming newsletters and social media so residents can look into it.

MML fall conference attendance: Mayor Dewey, CMs Papanikolas, Brittan Powell and Sweep indicated they plan to attend the fall conference which will be held virtually.

E-newsletter: Mayor Dewey thanked MPT Kulpa-Eddy for providing a draft e-newsletter for publication on the coming Friday. MPT Kulpa-Eddy listed the topics covered and asked for feedback. The following changes were approved: updating Homeowners Tax Credit application information to add Berwyn Heights' Tax Credit, adding absentee voting information, clarifying learning pod information, and updating the article on ITM Allen.

3. Minutes

There were none.

4. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey reported Pontiac Street is still closed and asked residents to be patient. BHPD is reminding residents to abide by all social distancing rules.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced upcoming hearings on the I-495 Managed Lanes Study and ongoing BHES kindergarten signups. She requested that information about the BHEAC's learning pod survey be posted on social media and asked about the process for social media posting. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that Councilmembers forward any items for social media publication to Clerk Harper, copying ITM Allen. Further, the Low Impact Development Center has completed its survey on Pop's Park improvements and requests a meeting with the Council.

CM Brittan Powell said the Code Department received a complaint about a fine. CM Sweep reported that Public Works is operating normally. Residents are requested to eliminate standing water in their yards to keep mosquitos in check.

5. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the schedule. The second worksession in September was moved from September 21 to 14.

6. Citizen Comments

There were none.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk